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AUTHOR Stokes, C. Shannon; Willits, Fern K.
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ABSTRACT

The sex-role attitudes of 910 once-married females, aged 40-44, were examined to ascertain their support for traditional as opposed to modern sex-role orientations. In addition, 5 variables (education, employment status, residence, age at marriage, and number of children) hypothesized to influence these attitudes were tested by analysis of variance for the statistical significance of the observed relationships. The subjects had participated in a 25 year longitudinal study of a cohort of people from nonmetropolitan areas in Pennsylvania. Data for the present study were obtained in 1971 by personal interviews and self-administered questionnaires. The 2 categories of items were: 1) attitudes toward work and employment; and 2) aspects of sex-role stereotyping. Findings show little support for either traditional sex-role attitudes or for the modern, equalitarian model. Instead, there was considerable ambivalence and ambiguity in these women's sex-role attitudes. Education was clearly the most important correlate of modern sex-role attitudes. Similarly, employed women and urban women had more modern attitudes than unemployed and rural women, although the effects of these variables were somewhat less than that of education. The 2 indicators of role-traditional living, age at marriage, and number of children, were largely unrelated to attitudinal dimensions. Findings are in tabular form. (Author/EQ)

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A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF FACTORS RELATED TO SEX-ROLE IDEOLOGY AMONG RURAL-ORIGIN FEMALES

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C. Shannon Stokes and Fern K. Willits
Pennsylvania State University

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ABSTRACT

The sex-role attitudes of 910 once-married females, aged 40-44, was examined to ascertain their support for traditional as opposed to modern sex-role orientations. In addition, five variables hypothesized to influence these attitudes were tested by analysis of variance.

The findings show little support for either traditional sex-role attitudes or for the modern, equalitarian model. Instead, there was considerable ambivalence and ambiguity in these women's sex-role attitudes.

Education was clearly the most important correlate of modern sex-role attitudes. Similarly, employed women and urban women had more modern attitudes than unemployed and rural women, although the effects of these variables were somewhat less than that of education. The two indicators of role-traditional living, age at marriage and number of children, were largely unrelated to the attitudinal dimensions.

A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF FACTORS RELATED TO SEX-ROLE IDEOLOGY AMONG RURAL-ORIGIN FEMALES

Introduction

That sex-roles are changing in American society comes as little surprise to even the most casual observer of contemporary social trends. The magnitude and rapidity of the change, however, is a matter of some disagreement. The mass media have tended to stress the blurring of sex-roles and the emergence of the "unisex" model (Bowers, 1971). One author has even labeled this the "beige epoch" or the "age of neuter" (Winick, 1968). Empirical research, on the other hand, has found continuing support for traditional sex-role stereotypes among both males and females (Mason and Bumpass, 1973; Broverman et al., 1972; Lipman-Blumen, 1972; Elman et al., 1970). These stereotypes not only describe the traditional "breadwinner-homemaker" dichotomy, but also encompass personality traits such as greater competence and independence among males and greater warmth and expressiveness among females. Moreover, these stereotypes are incorporated into both the ideal and real self-coucepts of men and women (Broverman et al., 1972; Elman et al., 1970).

Nevertheless, pressures for change of both male and female sex roles are evident. This paper focuses on the current attitudes of women toward selected aspects of the traditional female role. In this context, it seems reasonable to expect marked differences among women. While many embrace the traditional wife-mother-homemaker ideal, others reject this image of the "woman's place." The variables associated with these differing attitudes have been explored by a few writers. However, most of the research has focused on high school and college students, perhaps reflecting

an implicit assumption than changes from the traditional pattern will be most pronounced among persons in the younger age categories. (Kammeyer, 1966; Rosenkrantz et al., 1968; Vogel et al., 1970; Broverman et al., 1972; Wrigley and Stokes, 1974). The nature of the more mature woman's attitudes toward the traditional female role and the factors associated with her attitudes have received less attention.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the type and variation of sex-role ideology expressed by married, adult females who have virtually completed their childbearing years. The study has two specific objectives:

1) To examine the responses of a sample of women in their early 40's to ascertain their support for traditional as opposed to modern ideologies; and
2) To assess the association of these attitudes to variables hypothesized to influence sex-role orientations.

Women in the age category under study here might be expected to be more traditional in their attitudes concerning the female role than would younger individuals. These women represent a cohort reared in an earlier period when traditional norms were presumably more widely accepted. In addition, the aging process itself might be expected to be associated with a greater acceptance of traditional ways of doing things. This expectation has been challenged by the findings of a recent national study in which the investigators concluded: "We find no evidence of such intercohort [age] differences, nor of possible aging effects on attitudes either.... If these attitudes have changed in recent years, change has occurred among the older cohorts as much as or more than among the younger ones." (Mason and Bumpass, 1973:6). If their conclusions are correct, the attitudes of these women would be expected to be indicative of females

in other age categories as well. If not, then additional data on mature women should help to clarify any age differences which do exist.

Regardless of whether or not mature women hold attitudes which are similar to those expressed by younger women, the variables associated with these ideas might vary. That is, the factors conducive to acceptance of nontraditional ideology by women who have married and borne their children might differ from those associated with such acceptance by younger women who have not shared these experiences.

To explore the factors related to these women's attitudes, five variables were chosen for analysis: education, employment status, residence, age at marriage, and number of children. A woman's educational level, employment status and place of residence were believed to be factors associated with exposure to nontraditional role patterns. The higher her education, the greater her involvement in the job market, and the more urban her residence, the less traditional a woman's attitudes were expected to be.

Age at marriage and number of children were also expected to relate to attitudes. As Mason and Bumpass have noted (1973:16) "[these variables] represent the extent to which [a woman] has lived a role-traditional life." Consequently, age at marriage was posited to be directly related to the degree of modern sex-role attitudes while number of children was expected to be inversely related.[1]

Data

The sample used in the present analysis consisted of 910 once-married women who had participated in a 25 year longitudinal study of a cohort of people from nonmetropolitan areas in Pennsylvania. Most of

the subjects were between 40 and 44 years of age at the time the data used in the present study were obtained in 1971. Although all had lived at least part of their adolescent years in rural Pennsylvania, by 1971 they were located in both rural and urban areas and scattered over 40 states.

Due to the nature of the original sample design, all of the subjects were virtually the same age and nearly all were white. This homogeneity is both a source of potential strength as well as a weakness. It means that age and race are controlled and hence cannot confound the nature of the relationships under study here. At the same time, generalizations which can be made from the study are limited in terms of the age and race categories represented in the sample.

Data for the present study were obtained in 1971 by personal interviews and self-administered questionnaires. Each subject was asked to indicate the extent and type of her formal educational experience. This information was compiled into the following categories and each respondent was classified in the highest category which applied to her: less than high school graduation, high school graduation with no additional formal schooling, some college or other formal education beyond high school (including both two year and four year college attendance and nurses' training), and four year college graduation.

Employment status was measured by the categories of: employed full-time, employed part time, and unemployed. To be classed as "employed" the woman had to indicate that she worked "at a paying job."

Place of residence was derived by self classification. The subject simply indicated whether she considered her present residence as farm, open country nonfarm, town, or urban.

Each subject was asked how old she was at the time of her present marriage. Since all of the women included in this analysis had been married only once, this figure represented her age at first marriage as well.

Number of children was obtained by summing the number of children reported as living at home and those living away from home. Because this variable was believed to tap the degree to which the woman had participated in the maternal role, the total number of children, including biological offspring, step children, and adopted children was used. It should be noted that, since these women were generally over 40 years of age, it is safe to assume that their fertility was virtually complete.

Attitudes toward traditional sex-role ideology were assessed by eight attitude items focusing on specific aspects of the female role. These are listed in Table 1.

Subjects were instructed to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement and then to specify how strongly they felt about their response on a five-point scale ranging from very strongly (5) to not at all strongly (1). The result is a ten-point scale ranging from "agree, very strongly" to "disagree, very strongly."[2]

The proportion of all subjects giving each response was calculated. In addition, each item was scored by assigning values from one to ten to possible response categories. In every case the score was derived so that the higher the item score, the more liberal, or modern was the answer. The scores then represented the degree to which the subject's answers deviated from the traditional image of the female role.[3]

For descriptive purposes the items were grouped into two categories. The first dealt with attitudes toward work and employment and the second category focused on aspects of sex role stereotyping.

Findings

Description of the Subjects' Attitudes

A summary of the subjects' answers to the eight attitude items is given in Table 1. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the table is the lack of unanimity in responses. For most of the items, answers varied across the entire range of possible scores. Moreover, regardless of whether they agreed or disagreed with the item, the subjects were generally more likely to indicate that they felt "very strongly" about their opinions than any other single strength of response. For no item did as much as eleven percent of the sample say that they felt "not at all strongly" about their answer. Thus, although the women varied considerably in their attitudes, they felt fairly strongly about their ideas.

The specific items used to assess the subjects' attitudes toward work and employment gave a mixed picture of support for traditional and equalitarian sex-role models. The first two items received markedly nontraditional responses. The item dealing with equal pay for equal work received the highest (most modern) mean score of any of the items, with more than 90 percent of the subjects agreeing that women and men should receive the same level of pay if they do the same kind of work. More than sixty percent "strongly agreed" with this idea. Similarly, 75 percent of the sample disagreed with the statement, "A married woman should not work outside the home," indicating support for the woman's right to work.

In contrast to the response of these two items, the question of whether a man should be given preferences in hiring over an equally qualified woman, received a markedly traditional response. More than two-thirds of the subjects agreed that the man should be hired even if a man and woman are equally able to handle a job. Over one-third of the sample indicated that they "strongly agreed" with this position. Unlike the response to the other items dealing with work and employment, however, there was a sizable grouping (fifteen percent of the total) who strongly endorsed a nontraditional position and felt that sexual discrimination in hiring should not occur.

The items dealing with what we have termed sex role stereotyping covered a variety of different ideas concerning the female role. The first asked about the relative importance of education for boys and girls. More than seven out of ten of the subjects followed the traditional pattern by agreeing that a college education is more important for boys than for girls, and three out of ten felt "very strongly" about their opinions. Similarly, a fairly traditional stance was evidenced by answers to the item: "The best place for women is in the home." More than half of the subjects indicated agreement with this statement and over twenty percent felt strongly about their ideas. As with the question of preferential hiring, however, about 15 percent of the total "disagreed strongly" with these items.

Traditional attitudes toward marriage, the position of the husband in decision-making and the need for children received less support. More than half of the subjects disagreed with the items: "Every girl should get married if she possibly can" and "A woman should leave the major family decisions to her husband." Nonetheless, for both items, a sizable

minority (45 and 43 percent respectively) expressed the traditional viewpoint. The necessity of children for a woman's happiness received little support, despite the fact that more than 95 percent of the subjects had at least one child. Less than one-fifth of the respondents agreed that, "no woman can be completely happy unless she has children of her own," and fewer than 10 percent felt strongly about this idea.

In summary, responses to these eight items failed to indicate strong support for either traditional or modern sex-role patterns. While the subjects agreed that women have the right to work if they wish, they still saw work outside the home as primarily a masculine activity and felt that men should receive preference in hiring. On the other hand, they were almost evenly divided on the necessity of marriage and a majority rejected the patriarchal view of decision-making. In addition, an overwhelming majority felt that having one's own children was not essential to a woman's happiness. To what extent this reflected an acceptance of adoption, rather than less emphasis on children in general, was not clear due to the ambiguity of the statement. Regardless, the high rate of disagreement with the item reflected a deviation from the traditional emphasis on the importance and satisfaction of bearing children.

Correlates of Sex-Role Attitudes

Education, employment status, and residence were expected to expose women to nontraditional roles. Of these, education was clearly the most influential (Table 2). All of the mean scores for the educational categories were in the predicted direction and six of the eight were statistically significant.[4] College graduates clearly had more modern attitudes toward work and employment than women with less education. Moreover, the general

pattern in the mean scores indicated that increasing education had a consistently liberalizing effect on attitudes toward both the items dealing with employment and the sex-role stereotyping items.

Employment status was not as clearly or consistently related to the items as education. In every instance the two extreme categories, employed full-time and unemployed, differed from each other in the expected direction with the unemployed expressing more traditional attitudes than full-time employees. The mean scores for those who were employed part-time were not always intermediate as had been expected, although in only one case did these individuals express more modern attitudes than the full-time employed category. Only four of the eight attitude items were significantly related to employment status. Interestingly, all four dealt with some aspect of women and employment. They included the three items classified here as "attitudes toward work and employment" and the item "the best place for women is in the home." This would seem to suggest that, at least for women in this age category, employment status may relate to more equalitarian attitudes regarding aspects of the job and work, but it does not have a pronounced "spill over" effect into their attitudes toward other sex-role patterns.

While some have questioned the validity of place of residence as a factor influencing behavior (see, for example, Taylor and Jones, 1964), recent research has found continuing differences between rural and urban populations (Willits et al., 1973; Glenn and Alston, 1967). In the current study, the data by place of residence were not as clear or unequivocal as those by education. Nevertheless, five of the eight items did relate significantly to residence. In each of these five instances, (and for all

but one of the nonsignificant items), farm women gave the lowest or most traditional response, and in general, the urban grouping presented the highest score. Means for the intermediate categories showed some deviations from the expected pattern, but, overall, they indicated increasing liberality as residence moves from rural to urban.

As noted earlier, age at marriage and number of children were used as indicators of the extent to which women have lived role-traditional lives. Early marriage is generally correlated with higher fertility and lower educational attainment (Presser, 1971). Consequently, we expected age at marriage to be positively related to modern sex-role attitudes. The extent to which this idea was not supported is indicated by the data in Table 3. None of the items involving work and employment were statistically significant. While most of the differences were in the expected direction, the absolute differences were small. The failure to find a relationship between age at marriage and sex-role attitudes for these mature women does not obviate the possibility of such an association existing for younger women (Wrigley and Stokes, 1974).

The number of children a woman had was not consistently related to her sex-role attitudes. Although four items were statistically significant, careful inspection of Table 3 revealed little consistency in the relationships. Childless women appeared to be more liberal on our items than women with five or more children. On the other hand, the largest means (indicating a more liberal position), for six of the eight items occurred for women with small families - one or two children. Just why this should occur was not clear. In general, however, the differences were small and where they were statistically significant, no consistent pattern was apparent.[5]

Summary and Conclusions

We found neither strong support for traditional sex-role attitudes nor total acceptance of a modern, equalitarian ideology within our sample of women in their early forties. Instead, it appeared that there was considerable ambivalence and ambiguity in these women's sex-role attitudes. Over 75 percent of them disagreed with the statement, "A married woman should not work outside the home;" and nine out of ten felt men and women should receive equal pay for equal work. At the same time, two-thirds felt men should be given preference in hiring and a slight majority still felt that the best place for women is in the home.

Considerable sex-role stereotyping continues to exist. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that change is occurring. While our data do not directly document the occurrence of change in attitudes, the ambivalence in sex-role patterns noted above seems to warrant this inference.

Of the correlates of sex-role attitudes examined in this paper, education was clearly the most important factor. Higher education was related to more egalitarian work attitudes and less stereotypic views of the female role. This is in agreement with the findings of other researchers who have focused on samples of younger women.

Employment status was found to have a similar liberalizing effect, but its influence was confined to the area of work and employment. Women who were employed full-time had more equalitarian work attitudes than unemployed women, but were similar in their views toward other feminine behavior. Whether this selectivity in the effect of employment is true for younger women as well could not be ascertained from the present data.

It could be, however, that most of the employed women in the age category surveyed here would be assigned to traditional female occupations. Such an employment experience might be expected to have little influence on her overall definition of the female role, although it might affect ideas concerning her right to work and receive equal pay. As women enter more traditionally male occupations, the relationship of employment to attitudes may become more general.

The effect of residence was not larger nor unequivocal. Nonetheless, farm and rural women were slightly more traditional than urban women. The impact of residence was approximately that of employment status.

Finally, the two indicators of role-traditional living, age at marriage and number of children, were largely unrelated to either work and employment attitudes or to sex-role stereotyping. Number of children was related to two of the work and employment items, but the most equalitarian views seemed to be held not by childless women, but by women with one or two children. The failure to find the expected relationships between these variables and sex-role attitudes suggests that merely playing out the traditional wife-mother role does not, by itself, lead to endorsement of traditional ideology. Rather, it would seem that the exposure to alternative models is more important.

While a considerable amount of sex-role stereotyping continues, the findings that these attitudes are related to positions in the social structure indicate not only that change is possible, but mechanisms (such as education and employment) through which it may be effected (Broverman et al., 1972:76). On the other hand, proponents of change should recognize the confusion and ambivalence that will inevitably result from change in so basic an area as sex-role behavior.

Footnotes

1. In all of the hypothesized relationships it is unclear whether sex-role ideology should be taken as the cause or the effect. Thus, for example, higher education could lead to "modern" attitudes or modern attitudes might represent an antecedent condition leading to the acquisition of advanced education. Similarly, early age at marriage might result in the adoption of traditional norms or, the presence of a traditional ideology could lead to an early marriage. It seems likely that both situations occur. We have chosen to look at attitudes as the dependent variable, recognizing that this choice is somewhat arbitrary. The purpose of this paper, however, is not to address the issue of causal priority, but rather to determine if certain social factors are empirically related to sex-role orientations. If such connections cannot be established, issues of causality are precluded.

2. This is a modification of a procedure developed by Wolins at Iowa State University. For a discussion of this measurement technique, see Warland, 1969.

3. These scores were treated as interval scales for analysis purposes. For justification of this procedure, see: Labovitz, 1967 and Anderson, 1961.

4. Analysis of variance was used to test the statistical significance of the observed relationships. While the assumptions of this test may not be strictly met by the current data, the F-test is regarded as a robust test which is markedly insensitive to violations of assumptions, especially when the sample size is large. See, Boneau, 1960.

5. In addition to the analysis reported here, two factor analysis of variance tests were run using all possible pairs of the five dependent variables to determine if there were any significant first order interactions. The results of this analysis did not alter the conclusions of the present paper. The main effects of the separate variables did not vary appreciably from those reported here. Of the 80 interactions examined (8 dependent variables for each of 10 pairs of independent variables) only three were statistically significant at the .05 probability level (possibly a chance or random occurrence). None were significant at the .01 level. Moreover, there appeared to be no pattern to the interactive variables.

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Table 1. Attitudes toward work and employment and sex-role stereotyping[a]

Item	Number of Cases[b]	Agree 5	4	3	2	1	Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	Mean Score
		percent										
Attitudes Toward Work and Employment												
a) Men and women should get the same level of pay if they do the same kind of work.	(876)	62.7	11.4	11.1	2.1	6.5	.9	.5	2.9	1.5	2.7	8.79
b) A married woman should not work outside the home.	(873)	8.9	2.7	6.2	2.1	3.9	7.0	6.9	22.9	8.4	11.0	7.20
c) If a man and woman are equally able to handle a job, the man should still get hired.	(878)	37.4	8.9	13.1	4.0	5.4	3.1	2.1	7.6	2.7	15.8	4.14
Attitudes Toward Sex-Role Stereotyping												
d) A college education is more important for boys than for girls.	(881)	11.5	10.9	18.8	4.3	5.7	1.1	1.9	6.5	4.5	14.8	4.16
e) The best place for women is in the home.	(879)	23.1	7.5	14.7	4.2	5.1	3.6	2.7	16.8	8.0	14.2	5.15
f) Every girl should get married if she possibly can.	(877)	15.4	6.7	13.3	4.7	4.8	4.9	6.2	14.6	5.5	23.9	5.90
g) A woman should leave the major family decisions to her husband.	(877)	16.9	7.5	11.7	2.9	4.4	2.6	3.2	14.9	9.5	26.3	6.07
h) No woman can be completely happy unless she has children of her own.	(879)	9.2	1.8	3.3	.8	2.7	7.1	3.4	17.3	10.7	43.7	7.77

[a]Items were scored on a ten point scale so that the higher the score, the more modern (equalitarian) the reply.

[b]The number of cases varied slightly due to missing data.

Table 2. Attitudes toward work and employment and sex-role stereotyping by education, employment status, and residence.[a]

Item	Education					Employment Status				Residence				
	<H.S. (116)[b]	H.S. grad (584)	Some College (138)	College grad (70)	F	Unemployed (279)	Part-time (170)	Full-time (461)	F	Farm (95)	OCNF (247)	Town (371)	Urban (181)	F
	Mean Scores					Mean Scores				Mean Scores				
Attitudes toward work and employment														
a) Men and women should get the same level of pay if they do the same kind of work.	8.71	8.71	8.94	9.27	1.60	8.65	8.62	9.13	4.54**	8.63	8.87	8.70	8.99	.59
b) A married woman should not work outside the home.	6.54	7.06	7.63	8.52	8.07***	6.06	8.08	8.55	81.16***	6.20	6.81	7.62	7.47	7.87***
c) If a man and woman are equally able to handle a job the man should still get hired.	3.78	3.76	4.96	6.16	13.62***	3.61	4.68	4.68	10.88***	3.56	3.78	4.19	4.99	6.65**
Attitudes toward sex-role stereotyping														
d) A college education is more important for boys than for girls.	3.18	3.86	5.14	6.32	19.22***	4.11	3.90	4.41	1.30	3.91	4.17	3.99	4.74	2.23
e) The best place for a woman is in the home.	4.48	4.96	5.46	6.75	6.34***	4.38	5.39	6.32	29.33***	3.99	5.01	5.35	5.69	5.57***
f) Every girl should get married if she possibly can.	5.54	5.83	6.09	6.53	1.43	5.85	5.78	6.03	.35	5.62	6.24	5.62	6.27	2.96*
g) A woman should leave the major family decisions to her husband.	5.71	5.85	6.58	7.38	5.28**	6.04	6.04	6.13	.05	5.35	5.91	6.22	6.56	2.71*
h) No woman can be completely happy unless she has children of her own.	7.19	7.69	8.29	8.34	3.93**	7.59	8.15	7.84	2.39	7.72	7.89	7.62	7.97	.70

[a] Items were scored on a ten point scale so that the higher the score, the more modern (equalitarian) the reply.

[b] Numbers in parentheses represent the total number of cases in a category. The actual number in any test varied slightly because of missing data on the attitude item.

*Significant at .05 **Significant at .01 ***Significant at .001

Table 3. Attitudes toward work and employment and sex-role stereotyping by age at marriage and number of children.[a]

Item	Age at Marriage				F	Number of Children				F
	<18 (79)[b]	18-19 (302)	20-21 (243)	22+ (284)		None (36)	1-2 (327)	3-4 (407)	5+ (145)	
	Mean Scores					Mean Scores				
Attitudes toward work and employment										
a) Men and women should get the same level of pay if they do the same kind of work.	9.11	8.89	8.49	8.86	2.19	8.76	8.95	8.78	8.47	1.53
b) A married woman should not work outside the home.	7.07	7.15	7.11	7.35	.39	7.30	7.62	7.06	6.59	4.46**
c) If a man and woman are equally able to handle a job, the man should still get hired.	3.85	3.93	4.10	4.49	1.68	4.00	4.55	4.05	3.51	3.20*
Attitudes toward sex-role stereotyping										
d) A college education is more important for boys than for girls.	3.46	3.88	4.18	4.64	3.73*	4.12	4.61	4.19	3.79	1.26
e) The best place for women is in the home.	4.91	4.89	5.18	5.51	1.71	4.94	5.52	5.02	4.82	1.89
f) Every girl should get married if she possibly can.	5.85	5.66	5.94	6.12	.88	4.97	6.02	5.78	6.15	1.41
g) A woman should leave the major family decisions to her husband.	5.99	5.85	5.93	6.44	1.54	4.85	6.44	5.92	5.94	2.64*
h) No woman can be completely happy unless she has children of her own.	7.59	7.47	7.65	8.04	1.11	6.91	7.73	7.50	8.09	2.28*

[a]Items were scored on a ten point scale so that the higher the score, the more modern (equalitarian) the reply.

[b]Numbers in parentheses represent the total number of cases in a category. The actual number in any test varied slightly because of missing data on the attitude item.

*Significant at .95
**Significant at .99